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ABSTRACT

A study explored the perceptions and attitudes that 96 Wisconsin women (age range 18-95; average age 34) held toward leisure. Subjects were interviewed personally by members of a University of Wisconsin (Madison) class on "Women and Leisure," using parts of the Leisure Attitudes Inventory concerning three factors: society's role in leisure planning, self-definition through leisure and work, and amount of leisure perceived. These three factors were then compared to the demographic information obtained about the women in the study: age, marital status, children, occupation, hours of employment, income, level of education, residence, and religious preference. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, factor analyses, chi-square statistics, and analysis of variance. The study found that the women were satisfied with their leisure and that demographic variables did not seem to influence leisure attitudes and perceptions. (JMK)

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Women and the Dialectic of Leisure

Leisure in the lives of women is a topic which is discussed only infrequently in the literature. Assumptions have been made that leisure is a "genderless" phenomenon or that women have not really earned leisure since they have not been involved in paid work. More recently, however, it has become clear that leisure is an important issue to women and that researchers and recreation programmers know little about the leisure experience from the female perspective. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and attitudes which women held toward leisure.

The dialectic of leisure described in this study is the contrasting ideas between leisure and work and between leisure and free time. The model followed in designing the research originiated in the research of Neulinger (1974) who suggested that the primary components of pure leisure are perceived freedom and intrinsic motivations. Leisure is a state of being. Thus, the traditional dicotomy between work and leisure is non-existent; leisure can occur at any time, any place, or in any activity as long as there is perceived freedom.

Neulinger (1981) further suggests that leisure and free time are not the same. A person may have free time, but this is not necessarily leisure. Conversely, a person may have leisure which does not occur in "free time". This second view seems to describe the experience of many women.

Neulinger's construct of leisure is but one of many ways of conceptualizing leisure. Neulinger's concept attempts to describe the differences in defining leisure to focus on the perceptions of the definer. While the notions of time, antithesis of work, and holism can all be components of the definition, Neulinger derives his construct from the classical view of leisure as an experience, process, ongoing state of mind (Neulinger 1981).

Based on these concepts of leisure, Neulinger (1974) developed a Leisure Attitudes Inventory and tested it on a number of people. He discovered that females more than males felt the lack of leisure. Neulinger hypothesized that this finding may have occurred because the women in the study were employed full-time. Other analyses by gender were not conclusive.

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The research, which will be discussed today, examined the various leisure attitudes held by a group of women who were interviewed during the fall of 1982. No attempt was made to compare men and these women except in relation to the results of other studies which utilized this research instrument.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected as a part of a class assignment for a course entitled "Women and Leisure" offered at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Ninety-six women in Wisconsin were interviewed personally by members of the class using selected parts of the instrument developed by Neulinger to measure leisure attitudes. The items on this modified instrument resulted in three factors with loadings of at least .30. These three factors included: society's role in leisure planning, self-definition through leisure and work, and amount of leisure perceived. These three factors represent relatively stable and independent attitude dimensions in the leisure domain. The factors were then compared to the demographic information obtained about the women in the study: age, marital status, children, occupation, hours of employment, income, level of education, residence, and religious preference. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, factor analyses, chi-square statistics, and analysis of variance.

The following are the descriptions of the three factors:

Society's role in leisure planning refers to a wide range of potential free-time activities and the position that society should take regarding these activities. This factor notes society's effect on one's choice of activities during free time.

Self-definition through leisure or work refers to the relative importance of work and leisure in a person's life and how one defines the self.

Amount of leisure perceived indicates the amount of a person's perceived leisure whether it is too much, not enough, or just right.

Results

The following general demographic data were found and present a description of the women interviewed in the study:

1. The average age of the women was 34, but the ages ranged from 18-95.

2. The majority (52%) of women were single with 34% married and 13% either divorced or widowed.

3. Fifty nine percent of the women were childless. Altogether, only one child on the average was living at home.

4. Over one-third of the women were students while 17% had professional occupations. The remainder were evenly distributed among the occupations of retired, homemakers, clerical, sales, service workers, skilled laborers, and farmers.

5. The average employment for these women was about 22 hours per week.

6. The average household income for the women interviewed ranged from 22% having less than $5000 to 18% having more than $30,000. Overall, slightly less than half of the women had household incomes of less than $15,000.

7. The group of women was highly educated with 50% having at least a bachelor's degree.

8. The predominance of women (62%) lived in the city while only 10% lived in the country. This was almost reversed when viewing where the women grew up--61% had grown up in the country or in a small town.

9. Regarding religious preference, 47% of the respondents were Protestant, 28% were Catholic, 6% were Jewish, and the remainder were atheist or agnostic.

10. Only 2% of the women were black, and 1% were oriental with the remainder white.

General Results of Factor Analysis

One factor related to the role that society held in leisure planning. In general the women felt that society should encourage various kinds of recreation activities such as productive efforts, creative and artistic efforts, social affairs, physical exercise, and mental endeavors. The mean for all women on the seven point Likert scale used was 5.7 for these items. Scores were lower concerning the role of society in encouraging the taking of habit forming drugs, the consuption of alcohol, and activities which consisted of "doing nothing". Although there was no statistically significant differences, older women (43-51) thought the society should be more involved in leisure planning than did the younger women (26-41). Marital status showed a statistically significant difference among the women. Those who were single or divorced saw the role of society as being more

salient than those who were married.

No statistically significant differences were found for women regarding the factor of self-definition through work or leisure. The women seemed to be quite moderate in their attitudes toward defining themselves by work or leisure. It was not clear that either was more important in the definition of self.

Overall the women in this study seemed to perceive that they had a lack of leisure when their scores were compared on the amount of perceived leisure scale. Education played a statistically significant difference in how women perceived their leisure. The more education that a woman had, the more she percieved that she lacked leisure.

Demographic Differences

Another important research question explored in this study was the differences among women regarding demographic characteristics and their attitudes and perceptions of leisure. Using statistical procedures to determine significant differences, few differences were found among the women in this research study. This could be the fault of the sampling procedures which were used or it could be that, in general, women differ very little from each other.. Previous leisure research has suggested some differences in demographic traits and leisure behavior across the population, but generally the research results have not been consistent. Since this study used only women as subjects, it can not be determined how leisure attitudes might differ between the genders.

Among the results which were found, age did not seem to affect the attitudes or perceptions of leisure held by women. Age did not affect whether women perceived a distinction between free time and leisure.

Marital status affected only two relationsnips regarding attitudes toward leisure. Single women desired an average of two more weeks of vacation a year than married women desired. Singles and divorced/separated women felt society should encourage free time activities. Married women rated society's role lower. Otherwise, single, married, and divorced/widowed women all had similar attitudes toward leisure.

Few differences existed regarding the occupations of women in the study. Women in manager/proprietor positions tended to have a higher sense of self-definition through their work and leisure than did women who were employed as skilled workers. Professional women and housewives generally did not make the distinction between leisure and free time that women in other occupations did.

No relationsnips were found between the income of women

in the study and their attitudes or perceptions of leisure.

College educated women were less satisfied with their perception of the leisure available to them. On the average, the more educated a woman was, the less satisfied she was with the amount of free time--more free time was desired.

The size of the community in which the women in the study lived had no relationship to their attitudes toward leisure. However, women who had grown up in the country or in small towns saw a greater distinction between leisure and free time than those women who had grown up in more populated areas.

Regarding the ideal number of weeks of vacation, religion had some relationship. Protestants and Catholics wanted significantly fewer weeks of vacation (6 weeks) compared to all other religious preferences in the study (16 weeks).

Other Findings

No statistically significant differences were found regarding whether a distinction was made between free time and leisure and the demographic characteristics. Forty six percent of the women said they did make a distinction between leisure and free time while 54% said they did not. About half of these women who indicated that there was a distinction said that half of their free time could be classified as leisure.

The women were asked how much time they would ideally like to spend in each of three broad categories of activities. On the average, the women said they would like to spend 35% of their time at work, although this response ranged from 10-70%. Life maintenance time consists of those things which people must do for survival, health, and safety such as sleeping, eating, laundry, shopping, etc. Women said they would like to spend 28% of their time in these activities and the responses ranged from 10-50%. Regarding free time, the average response was that the women would like to have 36% of their time devoted to free time activities--slightly more than what they desired for work time. No differences existed demographically on any of these ideal hours.

When asked what kind of society women would like their children to live in, 74% responded that they wished a society where a life of work and leisure are balanced.

Overall, the women interviewed seemed to have many things to do in their free time. Twenty-one percent responded that their free time is always filled with thousands of things they want to do while 48% said they usually had no trouble finding things to do during their free time. Only 6% of the women indicated they had some problem knowing what to do with free time and these women were in the 18-30 age group.

Conclusions

On the basis of this analysis, it appeared that the women were satisfied with their leisure, although it was obvious that the work ethic was valued highly among the women in the study. Comments that were made by the data collectors indicated that many of the women had really not thought about leisure and what its importance was in their lives. Women had a range of perceptions and awarenesses regarding the dialectic of leisure and its relation to work and free time. Free time and leisure were one in the same for about half of the women, although this varied when compared to some of the other answers concerning specific attitude questions. In general, the women did not perceive that they had enough leisure compared to what they would like to have.

Demographic variables did not seem to influence the leisure attitudes and perceptions of the women in this study. Women seemed to be more similar to each other than different. The previous results which Neulinger found concerning lack of leisure due to full-time employment was not confirmed in this study. Lack of leisure seemed to correlate most highly with educational attainment which may or may not be reflective of employment.

This study was exploratory in nature; thus, we can not draw specific conclusions. The sample was not systematically designed so it is unwise to make specific statements about all women on the basis of the data. However, the study does provide some insight regarding how women view leisure. More research on gender considerations is needed as the roles of women in society change and as attitudes toward work and leisure change. Too little research has been conducted regarding leisure behavior as it applies to the "majority" of the population. The study of women and the dialectic of leisure provides a beginning.

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